

According to the 1878 Livingston County history book, local citizens decided to form and Old Settlers' Association. Franklin Oliver is mentioned in the poem that was written in honor of their first meeting.

Old Settlers' Association

In the year 1875, when the new Court House was completed, it was determined by the old settlers throughout the county that a grand re-union should be held and the new building dedicated. A preliminary meeting was called at the fair grounds early in the Fall of the year, at which C. B. Ostrander presided and John A. Fellows was appointed Secretary.

The 30th of December was the day fixed upon for the re-union, and committees of arrangements were appointed in every township in the county. On the day appointed, the old settlers turned out en mass. Tables, capable of seating fifteen hundred people, had been prepared by the citizens of Pontiac, and these were all filled. James McDowell was the President of the day, and John Fellows, Secretary. An address of welcome was delivered by Nathaniel J. Pillsbury. Letters were read from Judge Treat, who held the first term of court in Pontiac and from Hon. David Davis and Jesse W. Fell. O. F. Pearre, who had been requested to furnish a poem for the occasion, read the following poem.

ADDRESS TO THE OLD SETTLERS OF LIVINGSTON

One hundred years ago today,
The British troops in Boston lay;
Our sires then hardly thought that they
Would found a Nation
Whose ships would whiten many seas,
Whose flag should float on every breeze,

Whose armies could maintain with ease
Her lofty station.

And in that hundred years ago,
The deer, the wolf, the buffalo,
At will went roaming to and fro
Where now our county
Spreads out one vast and fertile plain
Of golden corn and waving grain,
Rejoicing 'neath a constant rain
Of Heaven's bounty.

Yea, men now sitting in this hall
In mem'ry can the time recall
When nature brooded over all;
When was unbroken
The solitude that wrapped the land
Where now our smiling cities stand,
When silence reigned on every hand
And gave no token.

Save by the hooting of the owl,
The clanger of the water fowl,
The red deer's signal or the howl

Of gray wolf, weary
In searching for his scanty food,
Save where, perhaps, some cabin rude
Seemed on the lonely scene to brood,
And served to point the solitude
So lone and dreary.

Oliver, Cummings, these can tell,
Wilson, McDowell and Darnell;
John Johnson knows the story well,
The quaint old story;
How Chief Shabbona and his band
Kindled their camp fires on the strand
Of fair Vermilion, when the land
Stood robed by virgin Nature's hand
In pristine glory.

Peace to thy shade; Shabbona, rest:
A warm, true heart beat in thy breast;
The white man's friend you stood confessed,
Among the bravest, truest, best
Of those we mention.
Thy name deserves a worthy place,
Brave chieftain of a warlike race,

Hist'ry accords thee little space;
I would more worthy pen could trace,
Thy fame, and, with befitting grace.
Thy virtues mention.

But, ah what mighty change has passed
Since the brave Chief Shabbona last
Upon the stage his vision cast.
What grandeur looming.

Is this through which Vermilion flows
From early morn to evening's close;
Through towns and farms the trav'ler goes,
Where fifty thousand souls repose;
The desert blossoms like the Rose
Of Sharon blooming.

Not Homer in his valiant crew
Could mention more good men and true;
McMillen, Breckenridge and Blue,
McDowell and Tuttle, Campbell, too,
And other worthies not a few.
Ye pioneers, it is to you
The debut of gratitude is due;

Ye builded wiser than ye knew
The broad foundation
On which our superstructure stands;
Your strong right arms and willing hands,
Your earnest effort still commands
Our veneration.

And you, who yet upon the shore
Of Time remain, strike hands once more,
To-day recount your trials o'er.
Repeat to us, from out your store,
The legions and the early lore.

Repeating
The name of Rummary, he who found
That famous railroad under ground;
Then pass the name of Corey round,
Cornell and Sprague, their praises sound;
Ladd, Dehner, Fellows, Fyfe, profound
On finance, Spafford, such names sound
In greeting.

We point to you, old friends, and say
The heat and burden of the day
You bore, and in an earnest way

We meet you,
Well pleased, indeed, to see you stand
On this glad day, a gallant band
Whose hands have wrought, whose brains have planned
Such vast improvements in the land;
With beating heart and open hand,
We greet you!

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where he is engaged in business.

At the election in 1866, over 3,300 votes were cast, and the average majority for Republican candidates was 1,100. Franklin Corwin, Elmer Baldwin and Capt. Wm. Strawn were elected from this district to the Legislature, over Douglas Hapeman, James Clark and Capt. M. L. Payne. The vote for county officers was: For Sheriff—James H. Gaff, 2,188; James Kirby, 1,115. For Coroner—Thomas Croswell, 2,231; Eben Norton, 1,117.

Capt. M. L. Payne, whose candidacy appeared at this election, was a well-known citizen of the county for many years. He served as Captain of a company raised at Danville, in the Black Hawk war; as Captain in the Mexican war, and subsequently as a Captain in the war against rebellion. He was a man of great energy and indomitable courage. He died of cancer, in May, 1878, and was buried with military honors, in the cemetery at Pontiac.

Hon. Elmer Baldwin, after his service in the Legislature, served one term in the State Senate, and is the author of the very complete and valuable History of La Salle County, recently published.

At the judicial election in June, Charles H. Wood received 897 votes for Judge of the Twentieth Circuit, and Geo. B. Joiner, 221. W. M. Taylor, 1,181 votes for Clerk of the Supreme Court; S. G. McFadden, 43.

In November, the vote was: For County Treasurer—Wm. B. Fyfe, 1,398; J. I. Dunlop, 738; John Dehner, 597. For Surveyor—A. C. Huetson, 1,525; E. B. Neville, 615; N. Buck, 555. Keeping up stock—For, 1,249; against, 977. This vote was under the provisions of a law, by which the county was to determine whether it would permit cattle to run at large or not. The adoption of the law rendered the expensive system of fencing unnecessary.

RAILROADS.

The four railroads which pass through the county make no small item in the importance and wealth of the county. From their building dates the filling up of our county and the bringing its lands into market. Without them we were, and, in all human probability, would have, remained a waving prairie.

The first road in date of construction, the Chicago & Mississippi, running from Joliet to Alton, was built in 1853 and '54. A few years later, it was sold out on the second mortgage, and bid off by Joel A. Matteson, for \$6,500. He run it for a time, and then permitted it to be sold, and it was purchased by T. B. Blackstone and others, who formed the Chicago & Alton Company, and have made it a successful road. The company purchased a controlling interest in the stock of the Chicago & Joliet road, and now, practically, it is a continuous line. The stations on their main line are Dwight, Odell, Cayuga, Pontiac and Ocoya. In 1869, this road built the Western Division, running from Dwight through the northern part of the county to Streator, thence southwest to Washington, in Tazewell County, with Nevada, Blackstone and Smithdale on it, and about the same time put down a second track from Odell north as far as Gardner.

This road now has sixty miles of track in the county. In the years 1858 and '59, the Toledo, Peoria & Warsaw road was built through the county. It was then known as the Eastern Extension of the Peoria & Oquawka R. R. The road becoming embarrassed, the Peoria & Oquawka part of it passed into the possession of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy R. R., and all the company had was an extension to a road they did not own. The company was re-organized as at present known, and pushed their road on, reaching the Mississippi at Burlington, Keokuk and Warsaw. They own eighteen miles of track in this county. Its stations are Fairbury, Forrest and Chatsworth. The road now known as the Chicago & Paducah has a local history, it being a Livingston County corporation. In 1865, Mr. Samuel L. Fleming, of Pontiac, a man who had spent a small fortune in railroading, drew, and got passed by the Legislature, a charter for a railroad from Ottawa to Fairbury. The corporators named in the charter were S. C. Ladd, B. P. Babcock, Samuel L. Fleming, Nelson Buck, Jonathan Duff, Wm. Strawn, R. B. Harrington, S. C. Crane.

John Dehner, Walter Cornell, M. E. Collins, Ralph Plumb, Enoch Lundy, David McIntosh, H. L. Marsh, W. G. McDowell, J. W. Strevell, I. B. Tyler and Wm. B. Lyon.

In 1867, the charter was amended so that the road might run anywhere northerly and southerly of Pontiac—that point being retained. The name, however, in the charter was retained. Under the impetus given to railroad building by the “grab law” of 1869, the company was formed, M. E. Collins being elected President and S. S. Lawrence, Secretary. The townships of Indian Grove, Avoca, Eppard’s Point, Owego, Pontiac, Amity and Newtown issued bonds, and with these in hand the Fairbury, Pontiac & Northwestern Company made a contract with Col. Ralph Plumb, of Streator, Col. W. H. W. Cushman, of Ottawa, and David Strawn, to build and equip the road, transferring to them all the bonds and issuing the stock to them, so that when built it became theirs. In this contract was a stipulation that the parties of the second part would never transfer the road to the Chicago & Alton R. R. Co.; the intent being, of course, to keep this a competing road. They built the road from Streator through this county, pushing it south through Ford, Champaign, Piatt, Moultrie, Shelby and Effingham Counties to Altamont. Its stations in this county are Newtown, Cornell, Rowe, Pontiac, McDowell, Lodemia, Fairbury, Murphy’s and Strawn. It connects at Streator with the Ottawa branch of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy. It has forty-one miles of track in the county.

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Several other railroad projects are in contemplation or progress, principal among which, that are likely to be built at no distant day, are the road from Dwight to Kankakee, and the Decatur & State Line road, to pass through the eastern tier of townships.

The first road authorized by the Commissioners was that known as the Avoca Road, and "extended from the south end of Locust street, in Pontiac, running south, east and south, to a point at the township line, being the southeast corner of the Taylor farm." Five other roads were also authorized and surveyed during the year.

The following shows the names of the principal officers elected at each subsequent township election, and, also, the number of votes cast at each :

Date.	Supervisor.	Clerk.	Assessor.	Collector.	Vote.
1858	William T. Russell...	E. R. Maples.....	S. L. Manker.....	James W. Remick....	179
1859	Jonathan Duff.....	R. W. Babcock.....	William Gore.....	C. N. Coe.....	200
1860	Henry Hill.....	A. W. Cowan.....	J. F. Culver.....	H. J. Babcock.....	121
1861	Henry Hill.....	J. R. Wolgamot.....	William Gore.....	J. A. Fellows.....	208
1862	B. W. Gray.....	A. W. Cowan.....	William Gore.....	J. A. Fellows.....	262
1863	John Dehner.....	F. H. Bond.....	S. C. Ladd.....	G. Wolgamot.....	237
1864	John Dehner.....	F. H. Bond.....	S. C. Ladd.....	J. R. Wolgamot.....	186
1865	John Dehner.....	J. W. Smith.....	S. S. Lawrence.....	Robert Kingore.....	214
1866	John Dehner.....	Isaac Aertl.....	J. H. Gaff.....	George Fowler.....	292
1867	W. B. Lyon.....	S. S. Lawrence.....	N. Buck.....	H. Tuckerman.....	259
1868	J. Duff.....	J. A. Fellows.....	William Gore.....	Charles Watson.....	387
1869	J. Duff.....	George Pittenger.....	William Gore.....	L. Bancroft.....	378
1870	J. Duff.....	W. H. Jenkins.....	William Perry.....	C. A. Campbell.....	427
1871	R. W. Babcock.....	J. T. Kay.....	William Perry.....	L. G. Goodspeed.....	458
1872	R. W. Babcock.....	J. T. Kay.....	William Perry.....	L. G. Goodspeed.....	462
1873	J. E. Morrow.....	A. W. Cowan.....	William Perry.....	J. H. Smith.....	424
1874	J. E. Morrow.....	A. W. Cowan.....	J. H. Gaff.....	James H. Campbell...	454
1875	J. E. Morrow.....	A. W. Cowan.....	J. H. Gaff.....	John Egan.....	520
1876	J. E. Morrow.....	A. W. Cowan.....	J. H. Gaff.....	John Egan.....	537
1877	J. E. Morrow.....	Z. Winters.....	William Perry.....	S. Mossholder.....	636
1878	J. E. Morrow.....	A. W. Cowan.....	William Perry.....	S. Mossholder.....	648

Compilation done by Dale C. Maley on August 28, 2023

Fairbury, Illinois, Historian